

SPRING 2006

Debbie Regala

State Senator • 27th Legislative District



Dear Neighbors,

During the final hours of the 2006 legislative session, I thought about the bipartisan and historic accomplishments achieved: legislation dealing with sex offenders, unemployment insurance, mental health and a first step toward resolving the medical malpractice debate. And after 29 years, we finally approved a measure giving basic civil rights to

Washington's gay and lesbian citizens. As a legislator, I'm proud to have had a part in making Washington a better place to work and live; and I'd like to thank you for the privilege of serving as your state senator.

The 60-day session ended a day sooner than expected. This may not seem significant, but much hard work, cooperation and a "nose to the grindstone" attitude was needed to accomplish early adjournment.

A more personal achievement this session was starting a legislative "blog," or Web log. I enjoyed blogging and will continue to use this new media. During the interim I'll blog periodically, keeping you informed of my activities and personal insights as I visit with constituents, so please visit my Senate Web page regularly: <http://www.sdc.wa.gov/regala.htm>.

Public policy doesn't stop when the Legislature adjourns; in fact, it continues at a steady pace. Legislative committees and meetings with constituents keep our office hopping during the interim. However, if I or my legislative assistant Lisa can be of assistance to you, please don't hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Debbie Regala".

Debbie Regala
State Senator

How to Reach Me...

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Committees & Leadership:

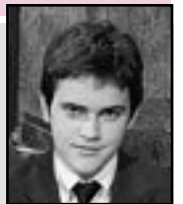
- Majority Whip
- Vice Chair – Human Services & Corrections
- Ways & Means
- Rules
- Water, Energy & Environment

Other Appointments:

- Legislative Ethics Board
- Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee, Chair

Thanks to our 2006 Senate pages

The legislative page program is a unique opportunity for students to learn about state government. Students between ages 14-16 are eligible to apply. For complete details about the page program, please visit our legislative Web site: <http://www1.leg.wa.gov/Senate/Administration/PageProgram/sen-pageprogram.htm>



James Bowman



Juliette Campbell



Jessica Grosz



Noah McKenzie



Marika Ota

Supplemental budget

Investing in our future and families was the goal of the legislative session. By investing now for proven programs, the state saves in the long run because it sets us on a path for success in education, health care, human services and economic development. Setting aside \$825 million in reserve accounts protects state services and helps prepare for increasing costs on the horizon.

Some of the investments made in the supplemental budget include:

Education:

- Helping students pass the Washington Assessment for Student Learning (\$28.5 million).
- Providing remediation for students falling behind in math (\$3.4 million).
- Creating a state early learning department (\$2.5 million).
- Enhancing the school breakfast program (\$2 million).

Health care:

- Funding Medicare Part D prescription drug co-pays for 100,000 of the state's low income seniors. Previous rules did not require these seniors, who were on Medicaid, to pay for prescription drugs. (\$18.2 million).
- Expanding the Basic Health Plan by 6,500 enrollments (\$11.2 million).
- Adding 10,000 enrollments to the Children's Health Program, for children who are not eligible for Medicaid (\$10.7 million).
- Boosting payment rates to nursing homes (\$10.1 million).
- Providing home care agency workers pay parity (\$6.2 million).

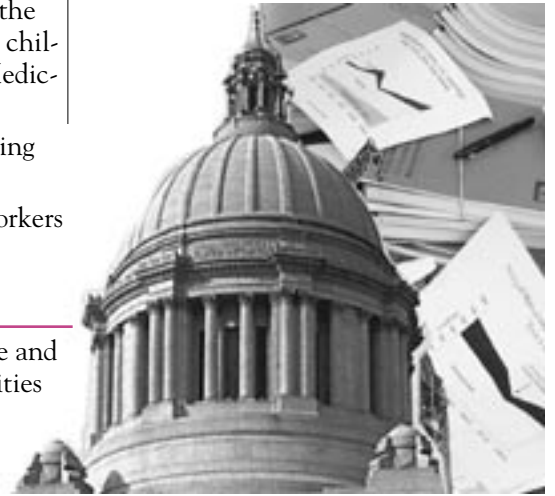
Community safety:

- Fighting methamphetamine use and manufacturing in our communities (\$4.9 million).

- Expanding emergency management and preparedness efforts (\$2 million).

Capital budget

The University of Washington Tacoma received \$4 million to purchase land around the campus, protecting its footprint for the future.



Biofuels

Last session, we adopted the California emission standards for cars and became the first in the nation to implement "green building" criteria for new state-funded buildings and public schools. Burning fossil fuels releases toxic chemicals such as sulfur dioxide and nitrous oxide, which decreases air quality.

By the end of 2008, the total automotive fuels sold in Washington will contain at least 2 percent biofuels: either biodiesel, a fuel made from veg-

etable oil, or in the case of gasoline, denatured ethanol.

Washington farmers could create a new agricultural commodity by growing biofuel crops such as mustard seed and canola. Additionally, the production of ethanol utilizes wheat straw, thus opening other agricultural markets. Biofuels such as ethanol-blended gasoline lowers greenhouse gas emissions and are more environmentally friendly. This helps keep our state green.

Legislative factoid

The Legislature introduced 2,594 bills this session. Only 391 went to the governor for her signature.

**This number includes the number of bills introduced in both the House of Representatives and Senate.*



Healthcare

Mental Health

The state mental health system and Pierce County in particular, has faced several challenges over the years. This session, the Legislature boosted funding to the Regional Support Network (RSN), a county's mental health management system. Statewide Medicaid payments and total RSN funding was increased by \$34.6 million. That's great news. This will improve the quality and availability of community mental health programs and services. With this increased funding, Pierce County RSN will receive a total of nearly \$50 million during the next fiscal year.

Pierce County lawsuit

Pierce County won an important victory. In *Pierce County v. State of Washington*, the court ruled in favor of the county, stating that the Department of Health & Human Services (DSHS) cannot delay court-ordered patient admission to state psychiatric hospitals because of unavailable beds or automatically charge the RSNs extra fees when these admissions cause the RSN to utilize more beds than their approved bed space.

The lawsuit also shed light on the growing problem of 'patient dumping,' the practice of discharging psychiatrically unstable patients from mental institutions without appropriate follow-up care. Untreated patients with few therapy options create additional demands on overcrowded jails, emergency rooms and homeless shelters, which are ill-equipped to manage psychiatric patients.

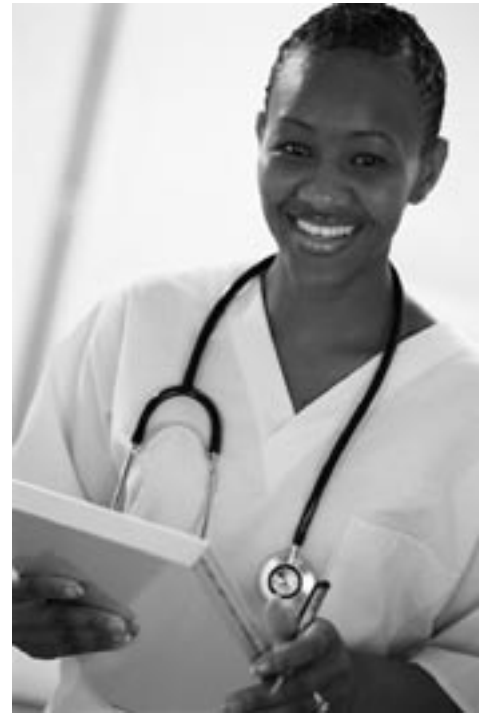


What does this mean for our community?

The lawsuit required Western State Hospital to establish sound discharge policies before releasing patients back into the community. The Legislature appropriated \$2 million to Pierce County thereby restoring lost funding to community programs. \$30 million was invested to open four additional wards at Western State Hospitals and one at Eastern State Hospital. The funds will also be used to implement a comprehensive strategy to better serve patients in their communities rather than in the state hospitals, including utilization of evidence-based practices in treating mental health patients. Once community capacity is developed, it is anticipated reliance on the state hospitals will decrease.

Community-based health care

In the past, community-based health care organizations received federal funding to help deliver vital services to our low-income neighbors. But this is no longer the case. To ensure that community-based organizations don't continue operating on a bare-bones budget, qualified nonprofit health care organizations will be awarded grants up to \$500,000. This additional money will lend a helping hand to the working poor, who are typically not covered by a medical plan or are underinsured.



Foster care until age 21

Each year, more than 350 young adults over the age of 18 leave foster care. This should be good news, but it's not always. Many foster children age out of the system lacking the education or vocational skills needed to get a living-wage job or to start on a career path.

This session, I introduced a bill (SB 6324) that would have allowed foster children to continue receiving foster care services up to the age of 21 while pursuing a post-secondary education.

The companion bill to mine, House Bill 2002, was approved. It allows up to 50 young adults per year to continue in foster care while pursuing a post-secondary degree or enrolled in a vocational program. To maintain eligibility, a youth must remain in school and maintain a 2.0 grade point average. This bill gives these young adults a chance to succeed in life.

Sex Offender Legislation

Preserving safety, protecting children

As you may know, I was co-chair of the 2005 interim Sex Offender Management Task Force. Working with law enforcement, prosecutors, the Attorney General and victims' advocates, I was part of a bi-partisan group of legislators who put together a strategy to protect children, promote community safety and punish violent sexual offenders.

All the members of the task force provided insight and thoughtful discussion on this very serious and complex problem. It was important to me to find solutions that truly promoted safety and didn't just sound tough. I worked hard with members of the task force to craft effective solutions to prevent future victimization of children.

I've had many frustrated constituents ask me why some repeat sex offenders aren't in jail with longer sentences. It's important to remember that courts must impose sentences based on the laws at the time a crime was committed. It is unconstitutional to apply sentencing laws retroactively. That's why community notification procedures are so important.

The following bills were part of a wide-ranging, comprehensive package of bills that increases minimum sentences for violent sexual offenders, expands monitoring, imposes tougher registration requirements and improves community education about sexual predators.

- Senate Bill 6319 strengthens registration requirements for sex offenders. Studies show a strong correlation between failure to register and re-offending. First time, non-compliant offenders receive a sentence of up to 12 months in jail. Second and subsequent offenses for failure to register will send the offender back to prison.
- SB 6320 requires the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs to review and improve statewide standards on community notification of sex offenders moving into neighborhoods.
- HB 3277 establishes severe punishment for certain sexual offenses against children and vulnerable adults, with a minimum sentence of 25 years in prison.
- SB 6172 increases penalties for voyeurism, possessing child pornography and using the Internet to communicate with a minor for immoral purposes.
- SB 6325 makes permanent a 2005 law restricting sex offenders who are sentenced for a first 'two-strikes and you're out' offense against a minor from living within 880 feet of a public or private school.
- SB 6775 creates a new crime of criminal trespass against children. This would also allow owners and operators of any facility that educates, cares for or provides recreational services to children to order any level II or

level III sex offender who has been convicted of a sex offense against a minor, to leave the premises.

A total of 18 bills dealing with sex offenders were signed into law by the governor in March.

Civil Justice: Civil Legal Aid and Public Defense

I am a strong believer in equal access to our justice system; every citizen should have access to legal counsel. When faced with serious legal issues such as employment, housing or family safety, many low-income residents receive little or no legal advice. A majority are vulnerable women and children.

For example, domestic violence victims need access to legal counsel quickly. This session, funding to the Office of Civil Legal Aid was increased, providing battered victims with legal recourse and the support needed to break the cycle of family violence.

Office of Public Defense

Washington's trial courts hear more than 2 million cases a year. The Office of Public Defense (OPD) provides legal representation to indigent clients, working hard to deliver efficient and effective legal counsel.

OPD received increased funding to improve criminal indigent defense services at the trial level, boost public defender training and better represent parents in dependency and termination of parental rights cases.

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